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Subject: Interview with DOE

As many of you know, the US Department of Energy has chosen the Caliente Corridor in central and eastern Nevada to transport nuclear waste by railroad. This happens to be about three miles from our house which is not too far from Beatty, Nevada.

On January 24th, 2005, employees from the Department of Energy (DOE), Nye County, Nevada and Bechtel SAIC Co (the contractor that will get most of the work) came to our residence to "answer" questions and concerns we may have.

Questions were asked by Kevin Emmerich (KE) and Laura Cunningham (LC), and most answers were given by Robin Sweeney of D.O.E. Two D.O.E employees were present, three Bechtel employees, and two Nye County representatives.

They showed us a map indicating that the train tracks carrying high-level nuclear waste to the Yucca Mountain storage facility will be located three miles to the east of our house. We expected the usual apathy you get when a large area of desert is developed. None of them seemed to care too much about the environmental damage. We were very surprised that issues involving safety and "the War on Terror" were underplayed. They have no evacuation plan if there is an accident and they acted as if there is nothing to worry about concerning the possibility of terrorists trying to disrupt their operation. Is it all propaganda? The federal government is giving a gigantic subsidy to the nuclear industry, paid for by us, instead of giving this massive subsidy to the solar industry, fuel cell technology, research into improved batteries, wind-power infrastructure, and other safer sources of power. And when the president says Yucca Mountain is for national security, it seems it is really only about space and throwing it out into our backyard. The bottom line is, we are moving before they build this thing!

Below is a list of our questions

KE, LC: What will the speed of the trains be?

D.O.E: 59 mph

KE, LC: How often will shipments be made?

D.O.E.: Three to four times a week.

KE, LC: How wide will the rail bed and access road be?

DOE: Not known yet

KE, LC: How high off the ground will the rail be?

D.O.E.: Not known yet.

KE, LC: Will there be passage ways for wildlife to cross?

DOE: Those issues will have to be addressed.

KE, LC: How frequent will overpasses or underpasses be along the railway?

D.O.E.: There will probably be overpasses going over Highway 95. (on the map, there are areas near Scotty's Junction where it looks like it crosses) It is not yet known how many dirt roads will be made accessible - they may or may not have passes. Some local people have asked for cattle access routes, which will be considered.

[L.C. and K.E. later thoughts: Wow! Mere 15-foot overpasses on busy Interstate Highway 95? Further questions: Will the overpasses be strengthened to withstand 8-scale earthquakes and 100-year flash floods? What if a truck crashes into the base of the overpass and catches fire? What is the safety protocol if the track is damaged and the train falls onto the highway?]

KE, LC: Will the section near us be fenced?

D.O.E.: We are asking locals. - Some want fences, others do not. This will depend on specific circumstances.

KE, LC: Will commercial shippers use the railroad also?

D.O.E.: "Shared use" will be considered, but there is no decision yet. This is potential. One train carrying construction material for Yucca Mountain per week will use the railway.

NYE County: The county may want to ask for shared use of the railway to help economic development for local communities. Bechtel personnel joined in and told us many potential jobs may spin off Yucca Mountain, including train maintenance, casque maintenance, tracking, communication, etc. Support facilities would also be built along the route. Nye County would organize this, and it might "benefit the local economy."

KE, LC: Will there be continuous remote security surveillance of the trains?

D.O.E.: Yes, satellite tracking.

KE, LC: Is there a bad weather protocol, in case of storms or flooding?

D.O.E.: Yes, a protocol will be developed, using satellite tracking and safe parking areas for the trains to back up into in case a section of track is "blown out." (but there is no protocol yet)

KE, LC: Will there be a safety escort?

DOE: An escort car (like a passenger car) will be on the last car of the train.

KE, LC: What will be the hours of operation?

D.O.E.: Any time of day or night, just like commercial railways.

KE, LC: Will there be truck transport on the highway in addition?

D.O.E.: No.

Nye County: It is politics - people would not stand for shipments on the highway. But numerous low-level nuclear waste shipments are trucked through downtown Tonopah without problem. Plus the Federal Government determined it was cheaper to construct a rail than to fund a truck highway shipment system.

Bechtel: Only 3,000 train shipments would be needed to equal 53,000 truck shipments.

[K.E. and L.C. thoughts: That is somehow supposed to make us feel safer?]

KE, LC: Why does the railway route not go through the Nellis Air Range?

D.O.E.: The Air Force has said that this would interfere with their bombing practice, and they have the say on this matter, so we cannot go through the range.

KE, LC: Will part of the railway use old existing train beds?

D.O.E.: Yes, parts of the old Tonopah route may be incorporated, with new beds also built. [We were given a copy of the map.]

KE, LC: When will construction begin on the railway?

D.O.E.: This is not known yet. Construction will begin when Yucca Mountain receives licensing, and this has been delayed by the lawsuit by State of Nevada concerning the 10,000 year ruling [in which D.O.E must develop storage material that will last more than 10,000 years].

KE, LC: Is D.O.E. working on better storage material for Yucca Mountain?

D.O.E.: " We don't know. That's E.P.A.'s (Environmental Protection Agency) job."

KE, LC: Will local residents be informed when shipments are passing by?

D.O.E.: That will be up to the state Governor and his designees.

KE, LC: What happens if the train crashes and the casques break? Is there an evacuation protocol?

D.O.E.: The casques weigh 150 tons each, made of one-foot thick steel with neutron-absorbers. Bechtel employees joined in, saying that the casques are designed to hold 16-foot long rods of spent fuel, each being "less than your pinky finger in diameter." The maximum number of rods a casque can carry is 44, depending on the fuel type, as different types of

fuel will be carried. (Robin Sweeney assured us that the train casques carrying the nuclear waste are very safe, and have been tested by dropping them off airplanes.)

KE, LC: That is not what we asked. - What will D.O.E. do if a casque breaks? What is your evacuation plan?

D.O.E.: "I can't see how they would break here." There is a only 99.9% chance of this happening.

KE, LC: How long will it take DOE to notify us if there is an accident?

D.O.E.: "We'll clean it up."

(L.C. and K.E thoughts: So there is no protocol to help local communities escape radiation exposure. You'll clean it up?)

KE, LC: What if terrorists use a rocket-launcher on the casque?

D.O.E.: "Why would they want to do that?" Rural people are not enough of a target; terrorists would go after a place with millions of people.

Nye County: "Who would want to blow this rural place up?"

[K.E. and L.C. comments: No explanation given about the integrity of casques against weapons.]

KE, LC: But what about terrorists wanting to steal nuclear material to make dirty bombs?

D.O.E.: We do not think that will happen.

Bechtel: Terrorists would not be able to transport the 150-ton train casque.

[L.C. and K.E. comments: This ironically implies that all the "War on Terrorism" we have been hearing about constantly on the news and from the present administration is just propaganda, and is not actually important at all in this case.]

KE, LC: This may sound a little paranoid, but will the Patriot Act be used on us and other residents along the corridor to check security?

D.O.E.: "Boy you are paranoid!" Robin Sweeney says she "does not think so." The government would have to investigate millions of people along the corridor through the entire country, and this would not be feasible.

KE, LC: Why do we need nuclear waste storage here in the first place? New D.O.E. Secretary Bodman said the country needs to get more nuclear power plants operational by 2010.

DOE: It was decided that the federal government will take

responsibility for the spent nuclear waste storage, because the commercial companies are running out of space at their sites. They are having to ship waste between sites to find storage. They cannot handle it. Currently there is 45,000 metric tons of high level nuclear waste stored that needs to be moved.

KE, LC: There are reports that say there is enough storage space to keep the nuclear waste where it is for the next 100 years.

DOE: I have not heard that.

KE, LC: Why is there not a push to research and use solar/other alternative forms of energy?

D.O.E. and Bechtel: We were just wondering about that ourselves.

After more comments by DOE about the safety of the containers, KE asked: If it is so safe, why not just ship it on Highway 95?

Nye County: Kevin, you are a savvy guy! It's about politics. People would never allow nuclear waste to be transported on highway 95!" Numerous low-level nuclear waste shipments and hazardous mining waste shipments are trucked through downtown Tonopah without problem. Plus the Federal Government determined it was cheaper to construct a rail than to fund a truck highway shipment system. She told us that for every one negative comment she hears about the Caliente route, she gets 10 positive letters in support from Nye County folks. (This is a distortion of the truth. The local people in our area are divided 50 percent approve and 50 percent do not approve)

KE: So now its more about politics than safety!

DOE: (no comment)

They were friendly enough, but if that is the extent of their knowledge on this transportation route, their work is clearly not finished...

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